

Barnet School Food Audit

November 2023

Executive Summary

Introduction

The London Borough of Barnet commissioned Health Education Partnership (HEP) to develop and conduct an audit of food and drink provision in Barnet schools. The findings will inform the development of Barnet's School Food Support plan, which aims to improve School Food Standard compliance and whole-school food provision.

Methodology

The audit took place between August and November 2023 and was conducted in two parts (desk-based research and school mealtime observations).

Part 1. Desk-based research (all Barnet state schools)

HEP conducted a mapping exercise using a variety of methods (survey, website review, Healthy Schools London Bronze audit reviews, telephone conversations) to identify which schools:

- Provide catering in-house or use external catering providers at breakfast, mid-morning, lunch and after-school
- Use vending machines, tuck shops, community fridges or water fountains
- Promote plant-rich diets via initiatives such as 'Meat Free Monday'
- Provide pupils with the opportunity to grow food at school
- Have a healthy eating policy and governors with overall responsibility for school food

Part 2: School mealtime observations (sample of secondary schools)

HEP conducted mealtime observations and menu cycle reviews in six secondary schools. A random stratified selection method was used to identify and invite a sample of five schools to participate. The London Borough of Barnet identified the sixth school to participate.

Findings

Part 1: Desk-based research (all Barnet state schools)

- 73% of schools (82% primary, 57% secondary, 33% special) provide breakfast to pupils. 75% of primary schools and 67% of special schools organise breakfast food provision in-house via school staff, whereas 56% of secondary schools use a catering company.
- 74% of schools (76% primary, 75% secondary, 50% special) provide food at mid-morning break. Of those providing food, 97% of primary schools use the National Fruit and Vegetable Scheme to provide food during morning breaks. In contrast, 62% of secondary schools use a catering company.

- 94% of schools (96% primary, 79% secondary, 100% special) provide food at lunch. Most schools (90% primary, 64% secondary, 56% special) use a catering company.
- 53% of schools (74% primary, 4% secondary, 0% special) provide food after school. Within primary schools, this is usually organised in-house (50%) or through a partner organisation (47%)
- The majority of schools have water fountains on-site for pupils (65% primary, 64% secondary, 0% special)
- The majority of schools do not have vending machines (14%), tuck shops (2%) or community fridges (0%)
- Over half of primary schools (55%) and special schools (56%) participate in the 'Meat Free Monday' initiative
- The majority of schools reported having a Healthy Eating policy (76% primary, 57% secondary, 67% special)
- Only 8% of primary, 18% of secondary and 0% of special schools reported that they had school governors or trustees responsible for school food
- 48% of primary schools, 18% of secondary schools, and 56% of special schools reported that they currently grow food.

Part 2: School meal observations (sample of secondary schools)

The following common themes were identified across the six schools participating in mealtime observations and menu cycle reviews.

Good practice

- All schools served appropriately portioned and well-presented meals
- All schools provided the same quality and value meals to students eligible for free school meals
- In all schools, student feedback was positive about the food on offer
- In all schools, the dining hall appeared welcoming and well-maintained
- The majority of schools had a 5* Food Hygiene rating

Challenges and issues

- None of the school menus were compliant with the School Food Standards
- Within the majority of schools, the breakfast and mid-morning food offers were the least compliant with the School Food Standards
- In all schools, non-compliance was primarily related to the provision of non-permitted items, an overreliance on restricted items, and limited and lack of provision of protein foods, oily fish, milk and bread.
- Within the majority of schools, water was not provided freely to students
- Within half the schools, it was observed that the amount of choice on the menu could promote fussy eating habits and opportunities for students to choose unbalanced and unhealthy options throughout the week.

Recommendations

The findings suggest that more needs to be done to support schools in understanding and meeting their obligations in relation to the School Food Standards, as well as supporting them in implementing a whole-school approach to school food. The London Borough of Barnet may want to consider some of the following approaches to support schools:

- Confirm and agree on the borough's expectations for compliance with the School Food Standards
- Provide training, advice and resources to support schools
- Identify food leads within schools to create a supportive network
- Set up a supportive system for monitoring School Food Standard compliance

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Introduction

The London Borough of Barnet commissioned Health Education Partnership (HEP) to develop and conduct an audit of food and drink provision in Barnet schools. The audit consists of two parts (desk-based research and school mealtime observations). The findings from the audit will feed into the development of Barnet's School Food Support Plan, which aims to facilitate compliance with the School Food Standards and improve whole-school food provision.

Methodology: Desk-based research (all Barnet state schools)

Between August and November 2023, HEP conducted a mapping exercise to identify which schools:

- Provide catering in-house or use external catering providers for their food provision at breakfast, mid-morning break, lunch and after-school
- Use other mediums such as vending machines, water fountains, community fridges or tuck shops to provide food or drink to pupils.
- Promote plant-rich diets via initiatives such as 'Meat Free Monday'
- Provide pupils with the opportunity to grow food at school.
- Have a healthy eating policy and governors responsible for school food.

A variety of methods were used to collect this information.

Initially, we developed a survey on school food provision and culture. This survey asked questions about the factors listed above and some additional related questions. Once commissioners reviewed and agreed upon the survey, it was sent to schools via the School Bulletin and Healthy Schools newsletter. A reminder email invitation was sent via the Healthy Schools network of contacts in late October 2023. Twenty-three schools (18%, 23/125) completed the survey (15 primary, 6 secondary, 2 special and alternative provision schools, 0 all through schools).

Secondly, we conducted a website review for all schools. 77% (97/125) of schools had data about their school food provision on their website.

Next, we reviewed audit documents and menu reports completed by schools achieving or working towards a Healthy Schools London Bronze award within the last two years. 18% (22/125) of schools had data from their work on the Bronze award.

We also included information collected from the mealtime observations conducted in secondary schools between September and November 2023 as part of this audit.

Finally, we phoned every school to collect any missing data.

Results have only been presented in this report for the variables listed within the Service Specification and for any other variables where a response rate of 33% or more was achieved.

Limitations

Data Accuracy

- The data collected via school websites assumes the information published is up-to-date and accurate.
- The data collected via the survey and telephone conversations relies on self-reported data. As a result, the data may not be accurate due to limitations in

the person's recall or knowledge in the area, or they may have responded in a way they thought was most socially desired.

Findings: Desk-based research (all Barnet state schools)

125 schools in Barnet have been included in this mapping activity.

- 89 primary schools
- 25 secondary schools
- 8 special or alternative provision (AP) schools
- 3 all through schools (with a primary and secondary phase)

Throughout the rest of this report, the three all-through schools in Barnet have been counted as two schools (a primary phase and a secondary phase). This is because food provision differs between the primary and secondary phases of the school. In addition, one of the special schools has two sites with different food provision at each. As a result, this has been counted as two schools as well. This brings the total to 129 schools (92 primary, 28 secondary, 9 special), and the response rate has been based on this total.

Breakfast provision

Does the school provide breakfast to pupils?								
	Total (129)		Primary (92)		Secondary (28)		Special / AP (9)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Yes	73%	94	82%	75	57%	16	33%	3
No	19%	24	13%	12	25%	7	56%	5
No Data	9%	11	5%	5	18%	5	11%	1

The majority of schools provide food and drink to pupils at breakfast. The only exception to this is special and AP schools; during telephone calls to schools, it was often reported that because pupils are brought to their school by bus and may not arrive until after 9 am, they prioritise a mid-morning snack rather than breakfast.

Who develops the menu and provides breakfast at the school?						
	Primary (75)		Secondary (16)		Special / AP (3)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
In house / school staff	75%	56	44%	7	67%	2
Catering company	7%	5	56%	9	33%	1
Partner organisation	17%	13	0%	0	0%	0
Not sure	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0
No data	1%	1	0%	0	0%	0

Within those schools that provide breakfast to pupils, the primary, special and AP schools usually organise this in-house, with school staff purchasing and providing breakfast. Some primary schools will also use a partner organisation to provide wrap-around care for pupils, which includes a breakfast club. In contrast, most secondary schools rely on their catering company to provide breakfast, whether that is an outside catering company or an in-house catering team.

62% (57/92) of primary schools provided information about the cost of their breakfast club. The average breakfast cost was £4.08, with the highest price at £6.75 and the lowest at 70p. Just under a fifth of schools, 19% (11/57), provide discounts for pupils eligible for free school meals or siblings. 29% (8/28) of secondary schools provided information about the cost of their breakfast provision. The average price of breakfast was 80p, with the highest cost at £1.40 and the lowest cost at £0.

Mid-morning break provision

Does the school provide food / drink at mid-morning break?								
	Total (129)		Primary (92)		Secondary (28)		Special / AP (9)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Yes	74%	96	76%	70	75%	21	50%	5
No	10%	13	9%	8	7%	2	30%	3
No Data	15%	20	15%	14	18%	5	10%	1

Who develops the menu and provides food / drink during mid-morning break?						
	Primary (70)		Secondary (21)		Special / AP (5)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
In house / school staff	97%	68	38%	8	100%	5
Catering company	1%	1	62%	13	0%	0
Not sure	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0
No data	1%	1	0%	0	0%	0

The majority of schools provide food and drink during the mid-morning break. Within primary schools, this is organised in-house and supplied by the National Fruit and Vegetable Scheme. The scheme offers free fruit and vegetables to all children aged 4 to 7. Within secondary schools, food during the mid-morning break is usually provided by a catering team, whether an outside catering company or an in-house catering team. 36% (10/28) of secondary schools provided information about the cost of their mid-morning food provision. The average price to students was £1.28, with a maximum cost of £2.55 and the lowest cost of £0.50.

Lunch provision

Does the school provide food / drink at lunch?								
	Total (129)		Primary (92)		Secondary (28)		Special / AP (9)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Yes	94%	121	96%	88	79%	22	100%	9
No	1%	1	1%	1	0%	0	0%	0
No Data	5%	7	3%	3	14%	4	0%	0

Who develops the menu and provides food / drink during lunch?						
	Primary (88)		Secondary (22)		Special / AP (9)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
In house / school staff	10%	9	32%	7	22%	2
Catering company	90%	79	64%	14	56%	5
Other	0%	0	0%	0	11%	1
No data	0%	0	5%	1	11%	1

Nearly all schools report that they provide lunch to pupils (94%, 121/129). Only one school reported that they did not provide food to pupils at lunch. However, this was due to extenuating circumstances linked to the increased costs of supplying Kosher food for pupils attending Jewish schools and the discrepancy between this and the funding the Mayor of London provides. Although Barnet Council is aware of this issue, it appears it still needs to be resolved. Five other Jewish schools reported that they could only provide sandwiches to pupils at lunches.

Most schools across all phases use a catering company to provide lunch. However, a higher proportion of secondary schools have their own in-house catering team. ISS was the most popular catering provider in primary and special schools. Meanwhile, Harrisons and Innovate Impact Group were the most popular catering providers within secondary schools.

Name of the catering company providing lunches in school						
	Primary (79)		Secondary (14)		Special / AP (5)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
AIP	1%	1	0%	0	0%	0
Aspens	0%	0	8%	1	0%	0
Caterlink	4%	3	8%	1	0%	0
Elior	0%	0	8%	1	0%	0
Feed @ Signature Education	1%	1	0%	0	0%	0
Fusion Cater	1%	1	0%	0	0%	0
Harrisons	1%	1	23%	3	0%	0
HCL	0%	0	8%	1	0%	0
Hermolis	1%	1	0%	0	0%	0
Innovate Impact Food Group	0%	0	23%	3	0%	0
ISS	59%	47	15%	2	100%	5
London Kosher Caterer	1%	1	0%	0	0%	0
Nourish	6%	5	8%	1	0%	0
Olive Dining	6%	5	8%	1	0%	0
Radish	6%	5	0%	0	0%	0
Tapuach	1%	1	0%	0	0%	0
The Pantry	4%	3	0%	0	0%	0
No data	5%	4	0%	0	0%	0

After school provision

Does the school provide food / drink after schools?								
	Total (129)		Primary (92)		Secondary (28)		Special / AP (9)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Yes	53%	69	74%	68	4%	1	0%	0
No	35%	45	17%	16	75%	21	89%	8
No Data	12%	15	9%	8	21%	6	11%	1

Who develops the menu and provides food / drink after school?						
	Primary (68)		Secondary (1)		Special / AP (0)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
In house / school staff	50%	34	0%	0	0%	0
Catering company	0%	0	100%	1	0%	0
Partner Organisation	47%	32	0%	0	0%	0
Other	1%	1	0%	0	0%	0
No data	1%	1	0%	0	0%	0

Most primary schools (74%, 68/92) provide food and drink to pupils after school. This is usually organised in-house by school staff (50%, 34/68) or a partner organisation (47%, 32/68). Twenty-one different partner organisations provide an after-school club to primary schools. Little Ladybirds London (LBL) is the most common after-school provider, delivering clubs to six primary schools (19%, 6/32).

75% (51/68) of primary schools provided information about the cost of their after-school club. The average cost was £9.97, with the highest price at £20 and the lowest at £3.00. 25% (13/51) reported that they provided discounts for siblings.

Only one secondary school (4%, 1/28) reported providing food and drink, and no special schools reported providing food and drink after school.

Menu compliance with the School Food Standards

School menus are reviewed for compliance with the School Food Standards as part of the Healthy Schools programme. Since April 2022, 18 schools (17 primary, 1 secondary) have received a menu review for their Healthy Schools London Bronze application. As part of this audit, six secondary schools received a menu review. In

addition, as part of this audit, we reviewed the ISS summer 2023 menus for 38 primary schools. Over the last 18 months, we have reviewed 48% (62/129) of school menus, and we have summarised the findings below.

On the first review, 0% (0/62) of school menus complied with the School Food Standards. Some menus were reasonably close to compliance. However, some of the common issues with non-compliance were as follows:

- Overreliance on restricted items (e.g. starchy food cooked in fat or oil, meat products).
- Overreliance on non-permitted and restricted items at breakfast and after-school clubs, e.g. foods high in sugar, fat or salt (pastries, jam, honey, cakes, crackers, dried fruit, fruit juice)
- Plant-based protein sources missing or lacking in variety
- Provision of oily fish missing
- Provision of milk

This becomes especially problematic in primary schools where the lunch catering provider is often different from the breakfast and after-school club providers. When the catering provider meets the limit of restricted items during lunchtime, it is challenging for breakfast and after-school club menus to be compliant. This problem is compounded by the fact that there is usually no one in the school coordinating or monitoring food provision across the school day or ensuring that breakfast / after-school providers and lunchtime caterers are liaising about the food provided.

It can be confusing for staff organising contracts with catering providers and partner organisations, as many of these organisations will explicitly state that they meet the School Food Standards. However, this is misleading and shouldn't be stated unless that catering provider is the sole provider of food and drink on site.

Issues were also identified concerning the amount of choice available to pupils. Within some menus, there is a concern that the amount of choice on offer facilitates fussy eating and reduces the chances of pupils having a balanced and healthy meal each day across the week. For example, based on one lunch menu, a pupil could choose the following during a week:

- Monday: Pizza and wedges (no protein source, less healthy starchy carbohydrates)
- Tuesday: Quorn sausage hot dog with boiled potatoes (processed product)
- Wednesday: Tomato and herb puff pastry, roast potatoes (no protein source, pastry)
- Thursday: Spaghetti with tomato sauce (an unbalanced meal with no protein source)
- Friday: Jacket potato with coleslaw (lacking a food from the protein group)

These results highlight the complexity and skill involved in designing a menu compliant with the School Food Standards whilst supporting a sustainable, affordable and nutritious diet. For many schools, it will be unlikely that there will be a member of staff responsible for reviewing menus provided by catering companies and partner organisations. Many will rely on the catering company's 'promise' that they are meeting the School Food Standards. Many others won't be aware that breakfast and afterschool provision must also follow the standards. While there is no one outside of the school monitoring or regulating the food provided, e.g., Local Authority or Ofsted, these issues are often missed.

Other mediums used to provide food and drink to pupils

Do you have vending machines for pupils on site?						
	Primary (92)		Secondary (28)		Special / AP (9)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Yes	0%	0	14%	4	0%	0
No	83%	76	50%	14	78%	7
No data	17%	16	36%	10	22%	2

Of those schools that responded, 0% (0/92) of primary and special schools (0/9) reported having vending machines on site. 14% (4/28) of secondary schools reported having a vending machine. However, 50% (2/4) reported that these were only available to sixth-form students.

Do you have water fountains for pupils on site?						
	Primary (92)		Secondary (28)		Special / AP (9)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Yes	65%	60	64%	18	0%	0
No	20%	18	0%	0	89%	8
No data	15%	14	36%	10	11%	1

Most primary (65%) and secondary schools (64%) reported having water fountains available to pupils. 0% of special schools reported having water fountains. A number of special schools commented that due to the needs of the children, they had water available in the classrooms instead.

Of the 20% of primary schools that reported not having water fountains, a number of school staff commented that these had not been reinstated since the COVID pandemic.

Do you have a tuck shop for pupils on site?						
	Primary (92)		Secondary (28)		Special / AP (9)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Yes	2%	2	0%	0	0%	0
No	80%	74	64%	18	78%	7
No data	17%	16	36%	10	22%	2

Only 2% (2/92) primary schools reported that they had a tuck shop for pupils. 0% of secondary (0/28) and special schools (0/9) reported having a tuck shop.

Do you have a community fridge on site?						
	Primary (92)		Secondary (28)		Special / AP (9)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Yes	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0
No	83%	76	64%	18	78%	7
No data	17%	16	36%	10	22%	2

No schools (0% of primary, secondary or special) reported having a community fridge.

Sustainability and health promotion initiatives promoted by schools

Do you implement any of the following sustainability of health promotion initiatives at school?						
	Primary (92)		Secondary (28)		Special / AP (9)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Meat Free Mondays	55%	51	11%	3	56%	5
All fish served is sustainable in line with Marina Conservation Society's Good Fish Guide	51%	47	14%	4	33%	3
All eggs are free range	54%	50	14%	4	33%	3
Vegetarian or plant-based options are offered to all pupils on a regular basis	57%	52	18%	5	67%	6

Over half of primary schools (55%) and special schools (56%) participated in 'Meat Free Mondays'. Only 11% of secondary schools reported participating in the initiative. Similar percentages were recorded for schools reporting that they regularly offer vegetarian or plant-based options to pupils.

'Meat Free Mondays' is a popular initiative implemented by many schools, but based on the menu reviews conducted as part of this audit, it appears to need improvement. The initiative aims to introduce people to alternative protein sources, preferably from plant-based sources and other vegetarian proteins. This ensures the meals remain balanced, offer essential nutrients, and support sustainability and the environment. However, the 'Meat Free Monday' lunch menu often lacks a vegetarian or plant-based protein. We recommend including beans/pulses/lentils/Quorn or soya mince into the 'Meat Free Monday' menus.

Around half of primary schools (51%), a third of special schools (33%), and 14% of secondary schools reported serving sustainable fish in line with Marina Conservation Society's Good Fish Guide.

Over half of primary schools (54%), a third of special schools (33%) and 14% of secondary schools reported providing free-range eggs.

It is good practice to clearly label menus, and we would encourage catering providers and in-house catering teams to do so, e.g. sustainably caught fish, seasonal vegetables, and higher fibre. It may be that catering providers or in-house teams implement this initiative, but it was not always apparent from published menus or from telephone calls to schools.

Leadership and a whole school approach to school food

Do you have a healthy eating policy?						
	Primary (92)		Secondary (28)		Special / AP (9)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Yes	76%	70	57%	16	67%	6
No	3%	3	7%	2	11%	1
Not Sure	8%	7	4%	1	11%	1
No Data	13%	12	32%	9	11%	1

The majority of schools reported having a Healthy Eating policy (76% primary, 57% secondary, 67% special). Of those that reported having a policy, 39% (50/129) were able to provide a review date, which demonstrated that 66% (33/50) of the policies were recent (updated within the last 3 years). No comment can be made about the quality of the policies. 18% (23/129) schools reported having an accompanying packed lunch policy.

Do you have School Governors or Trustees who have overall responsibility for school food ?						
	Primary (92)		Secondary (28)		Special / AP (9)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Yes	8%	7	18%	5	0%	0
No	40%	37	18%	5	33%	3
Not Sure	35%	32	25%	7	56%	5
No Data	17%	16	39%	11	11%	1

*"The governing board are responsible for the provision of school food... It is the statutory responsibility of the governing body and trustees to ensure the School Food Standards are being met"*¹. However, only 8% of primary schools, 18% of secondary schools, and 0% of special schools reported having school governors or trustees with an overall responsibility for school food. These results suggest the importance of

¹ DfE (2023) School food: guidance for governors
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-food-standards-resources-for-schools/school-food-guidance-for-governors>

increasing understanding of the pivotal role that school governors/trustees play in ensuring the School Food Standards are met within schools.

Food growing

Do you currently grow food at school?						
	Primary (92)		Secondary (28)		Special / AP (9)	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Yes	48%	44	18%	5	56%	5
No, but we are planning to start this year	3%	3	7%	2	11%	1
No, but we have in the past	13%	12	11%	3	11%	1
No, and we haven't in the past	18%	17	25%	7	11%	1
No Data	17%	16	39%	11	11%	1

48% of primary schools, 18% of secondary schools, and 56% of special schools reported that they currently grow food. During telephone calls with schools, several staff reported that the success of food growing depended on a staff champion leading and organising food growing activities for pupils. Several others expressed a wish to grow food at school but stated that they didn't have anyone suitable to lead on food growing activities at the time.

Methodology: School mealtime observations (sample of secondary schools)

Between September and November 2023, HEP used a random stratified sample to obtain a representative sample of 5 Barnet secondary schools. There were 3 sample groups:

1. Special Schools
2. Academies (including Academy Converter and Academy Sponsor Led schools)
3. VA Schools

Once the schools had been organised into these groups, we used a random number generator to create the order in which schools would be invited to participate in the audit. Within these three groups, schools were also prioritised based on their religious character. The aim was to work with one special school, one VA school and three academy schools, with at least one Jewish School and one Roman Catholic school represented.

The first round of invitations were sent to schools at the beginning of September 2023. If no response was received, each school was sent a follow-up email. If no response

was received from the school within seven working days, invitations were sent to the next cohort of schools.

The group of special schools and VA schools were significantly smaller than the group of academies, and these groups also held the majority of Jewish and Roman Catholic schools. At the beginning of October 2023, all schools from these groups were invited to participate in the audit. However, none of these schools had responded to the invitation. Follow up phone calls were made to the schools to encourage participation.

By 10th November 2023, six audits had been conducted within secondary schools. All participating schools were academies, and none held a specific religious character.

Each school participating in the audit received:

- A full-day audit of their food environment conducted by our Catering Operations Adviser to collect data on aspects such as food waste, portion sizes, feedback from students and staff, kitchen and dining equipment, food safety and hygiene, quality of free school meal provision, faith and cultural competency, good practices, challenges/issues, promotion of healthy eating, queuing, and funding for breakfast and after school provision.
- A review of the current menu cycle to assess School Food Standard compliance, conducted by our Senior Dietician (HCPC Registered)
- An individual report detailing results and recommendations

Findings: School mealtime observations (sample of secondary schools)

School A

The audit at 'School A' took place on 9th November 2023, and the menu cycle review was completed on 14th November 2023. The food service is provided in-house and offers food at breakfast, mid-morning and lunch. The school doesn't offer an after-school food service.

Good practice identified

- Portion sizes, quality and presentation of the foods offered are a good standard.
- Water is freely available and accessible via a fountain next to the servery counter and Kilner jars with drinking water in the dining room.
- Student feedback about school lunches is positive
- The dining hall is welcoming and well-maintained
- The kitchen is exceptionally well equipped. There is adequate storage for chilled and ambient stored foods. The cooking capacity is also well catered for with sufficient oven capacity.
- The food offered is creative and in line with trends and interests
- The school received a 5* Food Hygiene Rating

Challenges or issues identified

- The menus are not compliant with the School Food Standards
 - Breakfast – The breakfast menu offers several items that the School Food Standards do not permit due to high sugar, e.g. cereal bars, chocolate spread, golden syrup. In addition, the fruit juice exceeds the

- permitted portion. Juice is also offered at mid-morning break. It should only be provided once per day.
- Mid-morning – The mid-morning break menu offers several foods high in sugar and fat, e.g. croissants, cheese twists, cheese toasties, and sweetened porridge. In addition, a number of non-permitted items are available, e.g. cereal bars and muffins, squash and juice drinks.
 - Lunch – although the lunch offer is much closer to compliance, some amendments are required, e.g. providing oily fish and fruit-based desserts. In addition, high-fibre carbohydrates and dairy foods appear to be lacking.
- Queues at mid-morning break are quite long. This is because the whole school has their mid-morning break at the same time, which only lasts 15 minutes. The service flow could be speeded up by opening up an extra service point and allowing students to self-select their food options from the counter rather than being served by a catering assistant.
 - The menus don't list the complete food offer, e.g. several items are provided that are not listed on the menu. Menus need to be transparent and accurately reflect the entire offer.
 - The lunch menu offers far too much choice. This can support fussy eating.

School B

The audit at 'School B' took place on 2nd November 2023, and the menu cycle review was completed on 6th November 2023. The school has an external catering provider who provides food at breakfast, mid-morning break and lunch. The school doesn't offer an after-school food provision.

Good practice identified

- The bagels and cereals provided as part of the breakfast offer are free of charge to all students. The school subsidises breakfast for those students entitled to free school meals and adds £1.10 to their accounts to spend at breakfast.
- Fruit is available during all meal times
- Portion sizes are correct
- The lunch provision provides excellent exposure to a variety of tastes and cultural considerations.
- Student feedback about food at mid-morning break and lunch is positive
- There is a welcoming dining room environment which is well maintained and organised

Challenges and issues identified

- The menus are not compliant with the School Food Standards
 - Breakfast – the breakfast menu has a few healthier food options, such as cereal and fruit. However, the vast majority of the menu focuses on foods high in fat and sugar, including restricted items and food and drinks that are not permitted, e.g. waffles with caramel sauce, croissants, flapjacks, pain au chocolat, crisps, flavoured waters and squash.
 - Mid-morning – there are several restricted food items available every day, e.g. meat products (chicken nuggets, burgers, sausage rolls). The School Food Standards only permit meat products twice per week. In addition, there are several foods available that are not allowed by the

School Food Standards, including crisps, cookies and cakes. This offer is high in salt, fat, sugar and energy and low in vitamins, minerals and fibre.

- Lunch – the lunch menu is much closer to compliance with the School Food Standards. However, a few high fat options are regularly available (e.g. fried onions, bread with added fat, prawn crackers). In addition, during lunchtime, students can select from the 'outside pod' or 'side window'. The options available from these outlets do not always support a nutritious, balanced meal, e.g., lacking in protein, dairy, fruit, or vegetables.
- Water – Free drinking water is not available in the dining room at any time. Bottled water, flavoured milkshakes, flavoured juice drinks and hot chocolate are available to buy. We recommend that the catering provider offers jugs of water in the dining room.

School C

A menu review was conducted in June 2022 as part of the school's work towards the Healthy Schools London Bronze award. The audit took place on 13th September 2023. The school has an external catering provider who provides food at breakfast, mid-morning and lunch. The school does not provide food/drink after school.

Good practice identified

- Portion sizes are correct for the age group
- Fresh fruit and yoghurt pots are available during breakfast
- A good selection of healthy eating options is promoted at the mid-morning break service, including fresh fruit, yoghurt, sandwiches, and baguettes.
- The feedback from students during the lunch service is generally very positive.
- The dining room is welcoming, well maintained, and organised
- The school received a 5* Food Hygiene Rating

Challenges and issues identified

- The menus are not compliant with the School Food Standards
 - Breakfast – The breakfast menu exceeds the permitted number of restricted items (e.g. hash browns, croissants, pain au chocolat, sausages)
 - Mid-morning – the mid-morning offer exceeds the number of restricted items (e.g. potato wedges, sausage rolls, pepperoni pizza, burgers, hotdogs, sausage rolls).
 - Lunch – On the day of the audit, the lunch menu was compliant with the School Food Standards. However, a review of the menu cycle identified that the lunch menu exceeded restricted items such as starchy carbohydrates cooked in fat or oil, meat products, pastry, and confectionery.
 - Water - Free drinking water is not available in the dining room at any time. A drinking tap is available outside the dining room in the corridor, and bottled water is available to purchase within the canteen. We recommend that free drinking water is provided to pupils in the dining room, e.g. jugs of tap water on the tables.
- Only adults were observed sitting in the dining hall with meals on plates during the lunchtime offer. All students were observed eating out of takeaway pots,

even in the dining room. We recommend that plated meals are promoted over takeaway options.

- The kitchen facilities are challenging for the staff with a shortage of food preparation space and cooking capacity. The cooking and storage capacity resembles a two/ three form primary school.
- There is no restriction on what the £2.80 free school meal allowance can be spent on, e.g. one student was observed with three apple juices, two sausage rolls and two slices of pizza. £2.80 is the price of the daily main meal and dessert, providing a more balanced option.

School D

The audit at 'School D' was conducted on 18th October 2023, and the menu cycle review was completed on 30th October 2023. The school provides a breakfast and lunch service for students. A mid-morning break offer is only provided to sixth-form students. No food is provided after school. The food service is provided in-house and the lunch provision is a unique family-style service. Students sit at a designated table, collect dishes of food for their peers and serve each other their meals.

Good practice identified

- The breakfast offer is free to all students
- Student feedback on breakfast and lunch is positive
- Portion sizes, quality and presentation of food are of the required standard
- All pupils have a school lunch, no packed lunches are allowed
- A jug of drinking water is available on each table
- The dining room is bright and airy and opens onto the school's communal outside space. The lunch service has a positive buzz of excitement. Music is played during the service. The whole school receives their lunch in 60 minutes; no queues can be seen.
- The school kitchen has recently been refurbished and is well equipped with state-of-the-art facilities.
- It is positive that students can only choose between a meat or vegetarian offer, and the choice is not excessive. This provides confidence that all students have a healthy, balanced meal.
- The school received a 5* Food Hygiene Rating

Challenges and issues identified

- The menus are not compliant with the School Food Standards
 - Breakfast –most options (cereals and bagels) look to be compliant and provide a healthy offer. However, no fruit is available. Water is not freely available to drink, and the only toppings available for the bagels are spread and jam. Jam is not a healthy topping and can be interpreted as confectionary due to the high sugar levels. Jam offers no nutritional benefit. We recommend introducing toppings that provide nutritional benefits, e.g. low-fat cream cheese, mushrooms, tomatoes, cucumber, etc.
 - Mid-morning – this offer is only available to 6th form students. It includes several restricted items, including processed meats (e.g. hot dogs) and cakes (e.g. chocolate and blueberry muffins).
 - Lunch – while near compliance, the lunch offer could be improved by increasing healthier options within menus (e.g. steamed vegetables, provision of fruit and higher fibre options) and enhancing the variety of

protein for meat eaters and vegetarians. The provision of vegetables during the lunch offer is sometimes lacking, e.g., occasionally, carbohydrates (rice / sweet potatoes) are listed as the vegetable accompaniment.

- Water – Although available during lunch. Free water is unavailable in the dining area during breakfast or mid-morning break. We recommend ensuring free jugs of water are available at all meal times.
- Carbohydrate labelling – the number of grams of carbohydrates is listed on the menus. It is unclear why this additional labelling is provided unless there is a high percentage of students with diabetes, which is unlikely. This information is not required or useful for other students and could send the wrong messages about promoting carb reduction.
- Meat Free Mondays – a popular initiative implemented by many schools to introduce students to plant-based and sustainable protein sources. Unfortunately, the protein source from the vegetarian offer is often lacking. More needs to be done to ensure that beans and pulses are included in these meals to ensure that the meals remain balanced and offer important nutrients.

School E

The audit at 'School E' took place on 7th November 2023, and the menu cycle review was completed on 2nd November 2023. The school has an external catering provider who provides food during the mid-morning break (although this starts early at 9.20 am) and lunch. The school doesn't offer an after-school provision.

Good practice identified

- Portion sizes, quality and presentation of foods offered are of a good standard.
- There is a drinking water fountain in the dining room, which is accessible to all students.
- Students have positive feedback about the food on offer
- The dining room is welcoming and well maintained. Multiple sales points and staggered lunch times ensure queues move quickly and students don't have to wait more than 5 minutes.
- Excellent exposure to a variety of tastes and cultural considerations
- The school received a 5* Food Hygiene Rating

Challenges or issues identified

- The menus are not compliant with the School Food Standards
 - Mid-morning offer – This includes daily offers of pizza, burrito wraps and a selection of cakes, e.g. brownies, shortbread, flapjacks, and muffins. Cakes are not permitted outside of lunch and should be removed from the offer. It also includes some restricted food items, e.g. sausage rolls.
 - Lunch – some lunchtime options available to students are unbalanced and missing whole food groups. For example, street food and one-pot options typically lack vegetables. In addition, the protein source within vegetarian main meals is often lacking. All food offers must be equitable in terms of their nutritional benefits.
 - Drinks – whilst free drinking water is available in the dining hall. The canteen sells flavoured water which does not comply with the standards as it contains sweeteners/flavourings.

- Although the kitchen facilities are generally good, some flaking paint in the food storage room requires attention.

School F

The audit at 'School F' took place on 28th September 2023, and the menu cycle review was completed on 22nd October 2023. The school has an external catering provider who provides food at mid-morning break and lunch. The school doesn't offer a breakfast or after-school service.

Good practice identified

- The meal deal is excellent value for students
- Student feedback on lunch was positive
- The dining room is welcoming and well maintained. The space has been refurbished recently with new flooring and furniture. The school has an efficient queuing system from both sides of the dining room to three service points.
- There are plans in place to increase the oven capacity in the kitchens.

Challenges or issues identified

- The menus are not compliant with the School Food Standards
 - Mid-morning break – a high number of restricted items and non-permitted items are available during mid-morning break, e.g. croissants, pain au chocolat, burgers, potato wedges, potato waffles
 - Lunch – some restricted items are regularly exceeded, e.g. starchy foods cooked in fat or oil (chips, roast potatoes, garlic bread, Yorkshire pudding). Fruit and vegetables are available. However, the number of fruit pots available was minimal, which neither encouraged nor allowed all students the opportunity to have fruit. Protein sources for vegetarians are limited during one of the weeks within the menu cycle.
 - Water – there is no freely available drinking water in the dining hall. There is only bottled water available to buy.

Common trends identified

The following trends were recorded for all or most secondary schools participating in the audit and menu cycle reviews.

Good practice

- All schools (100%, 6/6) were observed to serve appropriately portioned and well-presented meals.
- All schools (100%, 6/6) were observed to provide the same quality and value meals to students eligible for free school meals. The quality and value of the food supplied to students with or without free school meal eligibility were the same.
- In all schools (100%, 6/6), student feedback was positive about the food on offer and little food waste was observed.
- In all schools (100%, 6/6), the dining hall appeared welcoming and well maintained
- Most schools (67%, 4/6) had a 5* Food Hygiene rating. One had a 4* rating, and the other was awaiting an inspection.

Challenges and issues

No (0%, 0/6) school menus complied with the School Food Standards. Within the majority of schools (67%, 4/6), the breakfast and mid-morning menus were the most problematic in relation to their compliance with the School Food Standards.

As expected, the reasons for non-compliance were mainly due to the provision of non-permitted items (e.g. confectionary, non-compliant drinks) or an overreliance on restricted items such as starchy foods cooked in oils and fats, deep fried, batter-coated or breadcrumb coated products, pastry, desserts and meat products.

However, there were several other common issues identified concerning missing food items and food groups that could have a significant impact on the nutritional quality of meals provided that need to be addressed, including:

- Protein Foods – (83%, 5/6) schools did not provide sufficient variety of protein foods to meet the School Food Standards. This was especially true concerning protein sources for vegetarian meals and on days where plant-based meals were promoted, e.g., 'Meat Free Mondays'. Most menus don't state the protein source for vegetarian meals, so it is uncertain whether it is lacking or varied enough. During audits when recipes could be checked, it was often found that these meals were missing a protein source entirely or that the same source of protein was being used multiple times a week. It is best practice to include a variety of plant-based protein foods across the menu cycle, e.g. beans/lentils or pulses twice a week, tofu, Quorn or soya mince once or twice a week, and eggs once a week to ensure the inclusion of essential minerals such as iron and zinc. Cheese should not be relied upon as a source of protein for vegetarians.
- Oily fish – The School Food Standards state that oily fish should be provided once or more every three weeks. Only one school (17%, 1/6) met this standard.
- Milk – There is a requirement that lower-fat milk or lactose-reduced milk be made available once per day to all children during school hours. Only one school (17%, 1/6) met this standard. Milk should be free of charge to eligible pupils. Charges can be made to other pupils (with parameters in place for the maximum cost per unit). However, it is recommended that milk be made available universally to reduce stigma. There is often confusion about who should provide this – the caterer or the school. Unless specified within the catering contract, this responsibility would lie with the individual school (who can access some financial support to minimise costs). The ideal time to offer milk is at break time, although logistically, this can be a challenge.
- Bread – There is also a standard for bread (with no added fat or oil) to be made available daily to students. Only two schools (33%, 2/6) met this standard. This standard was introduced to support children with higher energy requirements who may still be hungry after lunch. There is no requirement as to the amount of extra bread that should be provided, but it should be sufficient for all the pupils who want to take it, e.g. 1 or 2 slices of plain bread (not an entire sandwich). Although the standards require the extra bread to be freely available (i.e., so children can select it if they are still hungry after their main course), the standards do not require that the extra bread be provided free of charge. However, it is good practice and strongly encouraged that the extra bread be offered free of charge to students, especially given the increased rates of families being affected by food poverty.
- Within most schools (67%, 4/6), water was not provided freely to students in the dining hall, with only bottled water or other drinks available to purchase.

In addition, half the schools (50%, 3/6) were observed to have too many options available to students. Although menu choice may appear positive at first glance, a menu with too much choice can support fussy eating. Also, a large variety of options on the menu makes it far more challenging to comply with the School Food Standards, and you often find that many options available are nutritionally poor and non-compliant. For example, at one school, it was observed that pupils could:

- Choose a tuna jacket potato every day each week. This should not be an option. The frequency of tuna daily is a concern, as is the same carbohydrate daily with no vegetables provided.
- Choose a pasta dish each day with no protein source
- Choose a soup and roll each day. This will typically be low in energy and lacking in protein.
- Choose a high-sugar dessert every day.
- Choose toppings for cereal and toast at breakfast that are high in sugar, e.g., jam or honey. These could be swapped for healthier and more nutritious choices, e.g. vegetables, low-fat cream cheese, beans, and hummus.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings from the desk-based research and secondary school audits have highlighted several areas where Barnet schools are implementing good practice approaches to achieving a positive school food culture. However, the findings suggest that more needs to be done to support schools in understanding and meeting their obligations in relation to the School Food Standards, as well as helping them implement a whole-school approach to school food. The London Borough of Barnet may want to consider the following approaches to support schools.

Confirm and agree on the borough's expectations for compliance with the School Food Standards.

- Some of the School Food Standards criteria are unclear and can be open to interpretation. In addition, some areas of the Standards could be enhanced to improve the quality of meals provided in terms of their health and nutritional benefits. For example, expectations on the protein requirements for vegetarians and Meat Free Monday initiatives, the amount of choice that should be available to pupils, and the responsibility for providing milk to pupils.
- Agreeing and confirming these expectations at a borough level would provide a helpful starting point for providing clear guidance to catering companies and schools on what should be implemented in schools.

Provide training, advice and resources to support schools

- Providing webinars or training to school governors/trustees to increase understanding of the School Food Standards and how school governors/trustees play a pivotal role in ensuring these are adhered to.
- Provide training for all staff involved in the provision of food and drink in schools (e.g. school staff, partner organisations and catering companies) on the requirements of the School Food Standards.
- Produce a guide on food provision outside of lunch. This may be especially helpful for primary schools with different catering arrangements for their lunch and breakfast / after-school clubs. For example, if they have a catering company that provides their lunch, and they arrange food and drink for their

breakfast/after-school club in-house or through a partner organisation. This guide would offer suggestions for compliant foods/drinks at breakfast or after school, even if their catering company has used up all the allowance for restricted items at lunch.

- Produce borough-approved template healthy eating policy (currently, HEP provide templates to schools through the Healthy Schools programme)
- Provide specific support to Jewish schools to ensure they have the same opportunity to provide hot lunches to their pupils.
- Provide an advice service for managing the tender process for catering contracts. This would provide schools with the support to procure a catering service provider and negotiate a contract that meets the school and borough's catering requirements and service expectations.
- Provide a nutrition advice service for schools to provide support around reviewing food provision, menu planning and catering practices, and developing and implementing whole school food policies.

Identify School Food leads within schools.

- Encourage schools to identify a lead for school food to influence and lead strategic change within the school. Leads would be invited to attend regular networks and training to support them in implementing and sustaining a whole-school food approach. They would also be responsible for liaising with the board of governors/trustees to increase awareness of their responsibilities in creating a culture and ethos of healthy eating.
- Use the network to identify flagship schools to showcase excellence within the borough and support schools to come together to share practical ideas and experiences. This could link in with the Healthy Schools programme and awards achieved by schools.

Set up a supportive system for monitoring School Food Standard compliance

- Offer catering support and monitoring for in-house catered schools. Offering support and monitoring of a school's in-house catering service would provide insight into the standards of the service, a certificate of compliance and an overall review of the strengths and weaknesses with recommendations for improvement.
- Offer catering Service Monitoring. Regular monitoring of a school's catering service would offer insight into the standards of the catering service and whether they are meeting the obligations and requirements of the school.